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Response Essay 2 – Reading: On the Genealogy of Morality

“I take bad conscience to be the deep sickness into which man had to fall under the pressure of that most fundamental of all changes he ever experienced—the change of finding himself enclosed once and for all within the sway of society and peace… These half animals who were happily adapted to wilderness, war, roaming about, adventure—all at once all of their instincts were devalued and “disconnected… All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly turn themselves inwards—this is what I call the internalizing of man: thus first grows in man that which he later calls his “soul.” (Nietzsche 56-57).

Nietzsche in this passage is saying that bad conscience, which he takes to be an illness, was inflicted on humans once they transitioned from living in violent nature to peaceful society. The reason he gives as to why the condition develops is that the change in ways of living causes their prior instincts of aggression and exploration which served them well in nature become less essential in their new life and are now restricted. Nietzsche says that because the instincts remain, if they aren’t vented externally then they are redirected internally; this process leads to new complex psychological states Nietzsche refers to as the soul.

Here, Nietzsche describes a problem which he believes to be plaguing society. Not considering whether it is a problem, lets grant Nietzsche that it is a problem. Because Nietzsche refers to the condition as a sickness, I am left wondering: Can the condition be treated? What are the various way Nietzsche would say one can treat the condition? And are there any solutions that he isn’t considering? Since the problem is not inherent to our being and was rather developed with the shift from previously living in the wilderness to now living in society, it seems plausible that the illness may go away if one were to return to nature, although I wouldn’t consider this to be a viable solution for most people, and I think Nietzsche would agree. The next potential solution I can think of is to find some external thing to direct one’s primitive instincts towards. Although this may be difficult, because the problem arose when the instincts started to be restricted because it may simply be the case that they conflict with the forces of society and that there are no ways or too few ways of releasing them. Beyond these, I am left curious what other remedies Nietzsche may have to rectify the condition.